

Jean-Jacques Judge of Derrida

(An apocryphal dialogue,
on rereading Jacques Derrida's "The Ends of Man")

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Jean-Jacques Rideau (École Pratique de Théorie, Baton Rouge).— The conclusion of Monsieur Derrida's lecture has come to me as a surprise. As I followed his fascinating critique of humanist teleology it became gradually clear to me that his title, "The Ends of Man," was a piece of irony. Frankly, I did not expect him to endorse with such enthusiasm Nietzsche's own narrative about man as a transition towards higher ends—a myth which maintains (I think the word is not inaccurate) as strong dose of teleology, even of messianism. My question is, how do you exempt your own analysis from the complicity with metaphysics and humanism you denounce in Heidegger.

Derrida.— I do not. As I pointed out, we are allowed only false starts. My

analysis is not foreign to the tradition I criticize—it cannot escape the gyre of logos. Still, I would maintain that the circle and its center do not look the same when they are seen from the periphery; our duty [*tâche*], my duty if you will, is to avoid the center. Trying [*tâcher*] to avoid it. We cannot think of this as other than a moral fable. But something takes its course through us—I use the metaphor of direction deliberately. Both Sartre and I read Heidegger as a humanist. Both readings are misreadings; Heidegger is a Gestalt against a background of humanism at a given moment of the transformation of thought—but they are hardly the same misreading. Sartre is near the center, even passionately so, whereas I try to keep an eye over certain temptations. Even if my reading of Heidegger (or of the evolution of philosophical thought in France) uses the language of humanism and remains within the boundaries of metaphysics, it none the less has a certain centrifugal thrust. I am more interested in this impulse than in the precise geometrical point where it is being activated. I do not take the Nietzschean narrative at its face value—in fact, the notion that it has a face value at all is to be questioned. This version of the old myth—the myth of the ends of man—has a musical function in my own version. It is a theme, a ready-made sign, easy to recognize, of the way my text points to—a way which I readily agree can only be conceived of negatively (*en creux*) by our metaphysical age. And if it comes (as it must) to a question of strategy, of walking before we run, I believe that Nietzsche deserves far more attention than

he has got so far in the academia, especially as regards the implications of his thought outside the strictly philosophical concerns and departments of philosophy—we are still learning to read Hegel.

[Derrida, *Limited Inc*, Normativity](#)